United Nations S/2016/189

Security Council

Distr.: General
26 February 2016

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 5 November 2015 to 26 February 2016

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my previous report of 4 November 2015 (S/2015/837).

2. Two serious breaches of the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon threatened the fragile calm along the Blue Line and in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The violations of resolution 1701 (2006) took place on 20 December 2015, when three rockets were fired from the UNIFIL area of operations towards Israel, and on 4 January 2016, when Hizbullah carried out an improvised explosive device attack against two Israel Defense Forces vehicles south of the Blue Line in the Shab'a Farms area. On both occasions, the Israel Defense Forces responded with artillery and mortar fire north of the Blue Line. In both instances, UNIFIL immediately engaged with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to restore the cessation of hostilities and prevent any further escalation and my Special Coordinator engaged with the parties in Lebanon and Israel and regional stakeholders to contain the violence and prevent it from spreading further. Following the incident on 4 January, Israel and Lebanon reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and to stability along the Blue Line.

3. These incidents and the broader security situation in Lebanon continue to reflect the vulnerability of the country owing to the continued impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 12 November, there was a major terrorist attack in Beirut. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that killed over 43 people and injured over 200 others in the Burj al-Barajneh neighbourhood of Beirut. Along the eastern border of Lebanon and particularly around the town of Arsal, the situation remains unstable. There were frequent clashes between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Syrian armed groups, including the Nusra Front and ISIL, and there was fighting between the Nusra Front and ISIL by the Lebanese-Syrian border in the Qalamoun area. On 28 December, over 450 people, including the injured and their accompanying family members,

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were evacuated through Lebanon in implementation of a local agreement concerning four towns in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 1 December, the Nusra Front released the 16 Lebanese Armed Forces personnel held since August 2014, as part of a package deal involving the release of some prisoners held in Lebanon. Nine other servicemen held by ISIL remain in captivity.

4. There was some political momentum towards ending the 20-month presidential vacancy following parallel initiatives between the leaders of the 14 March movement and the 8 March Alliance. Notwithstanding the endorsement of Sleiman Franjieh by Future Movement leader Saad Hariri and the endorsement of Michel Aoun by Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, a thirty-fifth parliamentary session to elect a president was inquorate owing to the continued boycott of members of Hizbullah and the Free Patriotic Movement. There were further sessions of the "parliamentary dialogue", chaired by Speaker Berri, and the dialogue between the Future Movement and Hizbullah continued as well.

5. On 12 and 13 November, the Parliament met in an extraordinary session and passed a number of necessary economic and financial bills. Following an agreement brokered by Speaker Berri, the Cabinet met on 28 January 2016 in the first full session since July 2015. In that session, a number of decrees were passed, including the appointment of three Generals to the military council. In another session, on 2 February, the Cabinet authorized the budget for municipal elections to be held in May 2016. Prime Minister Tammam Salam continued his efforts to allow the Government to function and to ensure the continuity of some of the State institutions. During the reporting period, there continued to be regular, limited protests by civil society calling for better governance and improved delivery of services.

6. The number of Syrian refugees registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon remained stable during the reporting period owing to the entry regulations introduced by the Government of Lebanon in 2015 restricting access except in exceptional humanitarian circumstances. As at 31 December 2015, 1,069,111 Syrian refugees had been registered by UNHCR, including 55,833 in the UNIFIL area of operations. The total number of registered refugees saw a slight reduction of 9,227 people since my previous report, owing to continuous verification processes conducted by the United Nations, returns to the Syrian Arab Republic and some departures to third countries. During the reporting period, Syrians continued transiting from Lebanon to Turkey, hoping to reach Europe. Asylum seekers transiting to Turkey through Lebanon are facing restricted access by air to Turkey following a change in entry regulations that took effect on 8 January 2016.

7. The situation in the Palestinian refugee camps was tense during the reporting period, particularly following the announcement on 14 December that adjustments to the hospitalization policy of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees would be implemented from January 2016. The announcement was followed by sit-ins and peaceful protests in front of UNRWA installations in the camps. Since 11 January, there has been a significant escalation in the protests, forcing the temporary closure of a number of UNRWA installations, and sporadic general strikes, which forced the complete closure of UNRWA operations in the camps. Threats against UNRWA staff members were also voiced.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

8. On 20 December, UNIFIL radar recorded three rockets that had been launched towards Israel from the area of Hinniyah, south of Tyre (Sector West). One landed in a field south of the Blue Line, another fell into the sea off the coast of Israel, and the impact site of the third could not be located. Following the rocket attack, the Israel Defense Forces fired seven mortar rounds into an area near Zibqin (Sector West). No injuries were reported. There was no claim of responsibility for the launching of rockets, which was widely seen as a reaction to the killing of Hizbullah militant Samir Kuntar on 19 December, in what Hizbullah alleged was an Israeli air strike in Damascus.

9. On 4 January, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNIFIL that three improvised explosive devices had been detonated against two Israel Defense Forces vehicles south of the Blue Line, in the Shab'a Farms area. After the attack, the Israel Defense Forces fired a total of 122 high explosive and smoke shells, 82 of which impacted north of the Blue Line, in the vicinity of Arab al-Wazzani, Bastara, Majidiye and Meri (Sector East). The Israel Defense Forces reported that two soldiers had been treated for shock as a result of the attack. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL that there had been no injuries and only minor damage on the Lebanese side. Hizbullah publicly claimed responsibility for the attack, attributing it to a "Martyr Samir al-Kuntar Group" in reference to the alleged Israeli air strike of 19 December.

10. During both incidents, UNIFIL and my Special Coordinator maintained close contact with the parties, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, and urged them to exercise the utmost restraint and to restore the cessation of hostilities. In cooperation with the parties, UNIFIL carried out investigations to determine the facts and circumstances of the incidents. In his letters of 20 December 2015 (S/2015/1003) and 4 January 2016 (S/2016/4), the Permanent Representative of Israel stated that Israel held the Government of Lebanon fully responsible for any actions coming out of its territory; he called upon the Security Council to condemn Hizbullah and the attacks and to demand that the Government of Lebanon meet its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). In a statement on 26 January (S/PV.7610), the representative of Lebanon asserted that on 4 January, Israel had bombarded six Lebanese villages for one hour, noting that such unilateral actions undermined the credibility of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, threatened their security and jeopardized efforts to maintain stability in the region.

11. UNIFIL monitors the area of operations and the Blue Line and reports all the violations of resolution 1701 (2006) that it observes, including the presence of unauthorized armed personnel or weapons. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL does not proactively search private property for weapons in the south unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701 (2006), including an imminent threat of hostile activity from that location. In situations in which specific information is received regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations, UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within

its mandate and capabilities. To date, UNIFIL has neither been provided with, nor found, evidence of the unauthorized transfer of arms into its area of operations.

12. UNIFIL continued to observe the presence of civilians carrying unauthorized weapons in its area of operations, the majority of which were hunting weapons. On numerous occasions, armed hunters crossed the Blue Line. Most of the observed violations took place in the area of Blida (Sector East), where the Blue Line is visibly marked on the ground. On 5 December, in the area of Blida, an Israel Defense Forces patrol fired a smoke grenade in response to a violation of the Blue Line by an armed hunter, after which the hunter returned north of the Blue Line. In the same area, on 13 December, an Israel Defense Forces soldier fired one shot in the air after a hunter had crossed the Blue Line. UNIFIL protested to the Lebanese Armed Forces regarding the carrying of unauthorized weapons and Blue Line violations by armed hunters, reiterating that it is the primary responsibility of the Government of Lebanon to ensure that there is no unauthorized armed presence in the UNIFIL area of operations and that the Blue Line is respected in its entirety.

13. Almost all other ground violations of the Blue Line were committed by Lebanese shepherds and farmers, mainly in the areas of Shab'a Farms and Bastara (Sector East). UNIFIL personnel continued to warn shepherds and farmers approaching the Blue Line and to call on them to return whenever they were observed south of the Blue Line. On 31 January 2016, UNIFIL observed 12 civilians led by a local Member of Parliament, as well as a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces, crossing south of the Blue Line by approximately 10 metres for about one hour in the area of Bastara. The violation took place during a demonstration against vegetation clearance by the IDF in the Shab'a Farms.

14. Two ground violations by the Israel Defense Forces were observed by UNIFIL on 15 December, when an Israel Defense Forces excavator violated the Blue Line by about 10 metres, crossing into the Lebanese side in the vicinity of Shab'a village (Sector East) and, in a nearby location, 8 Israel Defense Forces soldiers violated the Blue Line by about 30 metres. UNIFIL protested both violations.

15. On 1 December, UNIFIL personnel heard an explosion in the vicinity of Khiam (Sector East). The Lebanese Armed Forces subsequently informed UNIFIL that a spying device had been detonated, allegedly by the Israel Defense Forces, causing injuries to two Lebanese civilians in a nearby vehicle.

16. On 5 November, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNIFIL that they had in custody a Lebanese civilian whom they said had crossed the Blue Line in the vicinity of Marun Ar-Ra's (Sector West). UNIFIL facilitated his repatriation on the same day and opened an investigation into the circumstances of the incident. On 5 February, UNIFIL facilitated the safe return to Israel of an Israeli citizen who was being held in custody by Lebanese authorities after having crossed the Blue Line some days earlier.

17. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued almost daily, mostly with unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. UNIFIL protested the overflights to the Israel Defense Forces and called upon the Government of Israel to stop them immediately. The Government of Lebanon also protested the violations to UNIFIL.

18. Israel continued the occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and of Lebanese

sovereignty. To date, Israel has not replied to the proposal submitted by UNIFIL to both parties in 2011 concerning security arrangements aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the area. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL in July 2011 of its agreement to the proposal.

19. Between 31 December 2015 and 4 January 2016, the Israel Defense Forces carried out a series of daily exercises involving artillery and mortar fire in the vicinity of the Blue Line in Sector East. UNIFIL protested the fact that the exercises involved firing close to the Blue Line and UNIFIL positions, posing a threat to UNIFIL peacekeepers and to the Lebanese population and limiting the freedom of movement of some UNIFIL troops, who had to go into shelter during the exercise on 4 January.

20. During the reporting period, UNIFIL generally continued to enjoy full freedom of movement throughout its area of operations. A few isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour against the Force nevertheless took place. In the most serious incident, on 17 November, a UNIFIL armoured vehicle was blocked on the road west of Tayr Harfa (Sector West) by two civilian vehicles with five men armed with two assault rifles and heavy hammers. During the ensuing confrontation, one of the men fired five rounds in the air, while another used a hammer to dislodge the machine gun and ammunition mounted on the roof of the UNIFIL vehicle. This prompted the UNIFIL troops to fire warning shots in the air. Before leaving the scene, the men forcibly removed additional military equipment from the UNIFIL vehicle. On 15 November, a UNIFIL patrol was blocked by four cars and approximately 20 civilians in the vicinity of Zibqin (Sector West). One of the civilians threatened a UNIFIL peacekeeper with a knife and another attempted to take the pistol of the patrol leader, while others threw stones. In response, UNIFIL fired warning shots in the air, after which the crowd dispersed. Earlier, on 7 November, a boy fired a hunting weapon in the general direction of a UNIFIL peacekeeper guarding a United Nations position in Sector West, resulting in a pellet hitting the peacekeeper on his fragmentation jacket but causing no injuries.

21. UNIFIL strongly protested these incidents to the Lebanese Armed Forces and representatives of the Government of Lebanon, requesting a full investigation, the return of all stolen equipment and that measures be taken to prevent this kind of incident in the future. All interlocutors condemned the incidents and expressed their commitment to addressing the situation, reiterating the continued appreciation of the UNIFIL presence on the part of the local communities. The stolen equipment was returned to UNIFIL on 25 November.

22. Notwithstanding these isolated incidents, UNIFIL relations with the local population remained largely positive. UNIFIL continued to carry out outreach activities with local authorities, religious leaders and civil society, who consistently expressed their appreciation for the activities carried out by the Force and their determination to cooperate with its personnel to maintain calm in the area of operations.

23. UNIFIL continued to implement quick-impact projects and civil military cooperation initiatives to support the extension of State authority in the area of operations and to assist local authorities in addressing some of the most pressing needs of the population. UNIFIL conducted joint training with Lebanese Civil Defence personnel on firefighting and search and rescue operations. It also organized a training session with municipal police personnel from the area of

operations, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNIFIL contingents continued to provide dental, medical and veterinarian assistance to the local communities.

24. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander continued his regular engagements with the Lebanese authorities, ensuring a coordinated approach to the security challenges in the UNIFIL area of operations and seeking increased involvement of the Government of Lebanon, its ministries and security institutions in southern Lebanon.

25. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued to deploy two brigades south of the Litani River. In the light of the tense security situation along the eastern border with the Syrian Arab Republic, the Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a reinforced presence in the north-eastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations (Shab'a village and the Arqoub area). During the reporting period, UNIFIL conducted an average of 14,000 operational activities monthly throughout the area of operations, including patrols, checkpoints and observation tasks. The increase in operational activities in the reporting period compared with the previous period was aimed at enhancing security in areas close to the Blue Line, in particular during the harvest season, and preventing incidents during periods of heightened tension, such as following the incidents of 20 December 2015 and 4 January 2016. The number of operational activities carried out by UNIFIL in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces remained largely at the same level as in the previous period.

26. UNIFIL also continued to carry out joint exercises and training with the Lebanese Armed Forces to further strengthen the tactical and operational capabilities of the Forces and enhance operational coordination and the effectiveness of joint operations. As at 31 January, UNIFIL had conducted 367 joint exercises, workshops and courses with the Lebanese Armed Forces, including its Navy. In accordance with its mandated tasks, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force provided training for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy and carried out maritime interdiction activities. During the reporting period, as at 31 January, the Maritime Task Force had hailed 1,632 ships and the Lebanese authorities had inspected and declared clear 337 vessels, in order to ensure that no unauthorized weapons or related materiel were transferred into Lebanon.

27. Although UNIFIL has no mandate to monitor the line of buoys, which was unilaterally installed by Israel and is not recognized by the Government of Lebanon, the Maritime Task Force maintained a visible presence in the southern part of the UNIFIL area of maritime operations to prevent tensions in the vicinity of the disputed maritime border between Israel and Lebanon. During the reporting period, it was observed that the Israel Defense Forces continued to carry out frequent maintenance activities at that line. Furthermore, on several occasions, Israel Defense Forces patrol boats positioned south of the line of buoys fired machine gun rounds and flares in a westerly direction.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

28. UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements with the parties remained a key element in the efforts to safeguard the cessation of hostilities, ensure respect for the Blue Line and promote security and stability in southern Lebanon.

29. Since my previous report, UNIFIL facilitated regular tripartite meetings on 25 November 2015 and 28 January 2016, during which representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces addressed security and military operational issues relating to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Discussions focused on air and ground violations, the occupation of northern Ghajar by the Israel Defense Forces, the presence of unauthorized weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations and claims by the Israel Defense Forces that Hizbullah carries out reconnaissance activities along the Blue Line, as well as the implementation of confidence-building measures to mitigate the scope for incidents along the Blue Line. On 28 January, the parties discussed the importance of preventing further breaches of the cessation of hostilities and reiterated their commitment to continue to make efforts towards practical localized solutions.

30. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander also maintained regular bilateral engagement with the civilian and military leadership in Lebanon and Israel to gain support for the implementation of measures aimed at reducing violations of resolution 1701 (2006), lowering tension and building confidence along the Blue Line. There was no progress towards the establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv.

31. On the ground, UNIFIL facilitated the smooth conduct of routine maintenance activities in sensitive areas close to the Blue Line, in close coordination with the parties. On 29 December, UNIFIL cleared vegetation affecting the Israeli technical fence in an area between Kafer Kela and Adeisse (Sector East) upon request by the Israel Defense Forces and in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. Additionally, UNIFIL continued to maintain liaison with the parties to facilitate the coordinated conduct of winterization works, such as clearing culverts of vegetation and mud, in other areas close to the Blue Line.

32. UNIFIL continued to work with the parties to visibly mark the Blue Line. During the reporting period, the parties carried out field visits with UNIFIL to measure and validate additional points and agreed on new points to be marked. As at 31 January, the parties had agreed to mark 314 Blue Line points out of a total of 528. Access paths to 313 of the agreed points have been demined and 255 points have been measured. The parties have verified 227 of the 238 Blue Line markers constructed by UNIFIL.

33. UNIFIL also continued to support the Lebanese Armed Forces through the implementation of the strategic dialogue plan and the promotion of military assistance by international donors to the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations. UNIFIL participated in the eighth meeting of the Executive Military Commission, chaired by the Lebanese Armed Forces, on 4 December. On 27 November, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces conducted a joint meeting of the strategic dialogue subcommittee on training.

C. Disarming armed groups

34. The firing of rockets on 20 December again provided evidence of the presence of arms outside the control of the Lebanese State south of the Litani River. The attack on 4 January proved Hizbullah's military capability and its readiness and willingness to use such capability in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups outside the control of the

Lebanese State, in violation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), continues to restrict the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In a televised statement on 16 February, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, again asserted that Hizbullah maintains a rocket arsenal, which he claimed serves as a deterrent against potential aggression by Israel. In the televised statement, he threatened to use the rockets to attack Israeli storage installations, which would lead to the deaths of tens of thousands of Israeli citizens. There were no meetings of the National Dialogue during the reporting period and no other formal discussion of Hizbullah's arms.

35. Following the terrorist attack in Burj al-Barajneh on 12 November, the security services reported the arrest of a number of ISIL suspects. Between 18 and 20 November, the security services raided locations in Sidon, Tripoli and elsewhere across Lebanon and seized a quantity of arms, explosives and belts for suicide attacks. They also arrested suspects believed to be preparing further suicide attacks.

36. During the reporting period, there was no progress in the dismantling of the military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada. In 2006, it was decided in the National Dialogue that the bases should be dismantled. The existence of the bases continues to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to monitor and control effectively parts of the Lebanese border.

D. Arms embargo and border control

37. In its resolution 1701 (2006), the Security Council decided that all States should prevent the sale or the supply of arms and related materiel to entities or individuals in Lebanon by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels or aircraft. In the same resolution, the Council also called upon the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and other entry points so as to prevent the entry of arms and related materiel into Lebanon without its consent.

38. Representatives of the Government of Israel have consistently reported to the United Nations that, according to their information, there are significant ongoing arms transfers to Hizbullah across the Lebanese-Syrian border and that Hizbullah has now amassed an arsenal of over 100,000 missiles and rockets, much of which Israel claims is located in civilian residential areas. Most recently, such allegations were reiterated in the letters of 20 December 2015 (S/2015/1003) and 4 January 2016 (S/2016/4) referenced in paragraph 10 above. In a statement to the Security Council on 26 January, the Permanent Representative of Israel provided examples of locations that, according to Israel's information, have been turned into fighting positions by Hizbullah. The United Nations takes those allegations seriously, including in the light of public statements by Hizbullah, but is not in a position to verify them independently.

39. Hizbullah remained engaged in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Funerals for Hizbullah fighters killed in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be held in Lebanon and, on 14 November, three Hizbullah fighters were reported to have been captured near Aleppo. Other Lebanese individuals are also reported to have joined armed groups fighting in the Syrian conflict. There continue to be reports of Lebanese nationals joining ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the

number of suspected ISIL members arrested by security forces in Lebanon reflects the role of radicalization by extremist groups.

40. The situation along the Lebanese-Syrian border was tense during the reporting period. On 6 November, a bomb exploded in the town of Arsal, causing four fatalities and a number of injuries. On 7 November, a second bomb targeted a Lebanese Armed Forces patrol in Arsal and injured five soldiers. The Forces continued to deploy robustly around Arsal and along the border. In early February 2016, the Lebanese Armed Forces raided a location in Arsal and arrested a number of ISIL suspects and seized an arms cache that also contained suicide belts. The Forces reported multiple clashes with militants trying to infiltrate into Lebanon, which caused a number of fatalities.

41. There were continued reports of movement of fighters and arms trafficking between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period. On 8 and 17 November 2015, the security services detained smugglers in possession of arms. On 14 January 2016, former Minister Michel Samaha was released from prison on bail pending his appeal of his conviction.

42. During the reporting period, there continued to be a number of incidents of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon. There were 31 shooting incidents, 32 shelling incidents, three rocket attacks targeting towns in Lebanon and two air strikes by Syrian Government aircraft on Lebanese territory. No casualties were reported as a result of those incidents.

43. On 12 November, the Parliament approved the allocation of $800 million for the Lebanese Armed Forces. The funds were intended to enable the Forces to renovate infrastructure and to be used for logistics and other non-lethal equipment not covered by the $3 billion grant from Saudi Arabia for the provision of arms and materiel from France. The Lebanese Armed Forces is in the process of updating its capabilities development plan to reflect assistance received to date and to highlight outstanding priority areas of need. Consistent with earlier calls by the Security Council and the International Support Group for Lebanon, international partners continue to also support the Lebanese Armed Forces on a bilateral basis to enhance the army's capability to secure Lebanon's borders with the Syrian Arab Republic and counter terrorist threats.

44. The continued implementation of security plans in Tripoli and the Bekaa contributed to a general calm in those areas, although incidents of concern occurred during the reporting period. As a result of the widespread illegal possession of arms, firearms were again used by criminals and in personal disputes. A series of incidents involving firearms caused a number of fatalities and injuries in Zahle, in the Bekaa town of Maqneh and in Baalbek, as well as in Dar al-Wasa where there were casualties from the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 1 February, the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested 39 people and seized a quantity of explosives, arms and ammunition after one person was killed and four injured in an armed disputed between two families.

45. As at 31 December 2015, over $1.1 billion of the $1.87 billion required for the 2015 Lebanon crisis response plan had been contributed. In December, the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations jointly launched the 2016 Lebanon crisis response plan, which requires $2.48 billion to provide humanitarian assistance

and protection to almost 2.8 million highly vulnerable people and invest in services, economies and institutions.

46. The Supporting Syria and the Region conference, held in London on 4 February 2016, resulted in an important shift in Lebanon's approach to addressing the Syrian refugee crisis. In its statement of intent presented at the conference, the Government of Lebanon publicly acknowledged that Syrian refugees are likely to remain in-country for a prolonged period of time and that more sustainable solutions are required pending their eventual return when conditions permit. International partners pledged important support not only to meet immediate humanitarian needs but also to address the longer-term stabilization and development priorities identified by the Government. In turn, the Government committed to reviewing existing regulatory frameworks relating to residency conditions and work authorizations, to enable the employment of Syrian refugees. Both issues constituted the main obstacle for refugees in securing livelihoods and accessing services. Approximately 70 per cent of Syrian refugees continue to live below the poverty line and increasingly depend on international assistance to meet basic needs. As a result of deteriorating conditions, there continued to be reports of negative coping mechanisms, including early and forced marriage, survival sex and child labour.

47. Following the launch in September 2015 of the "Back to School" campaign, approximately 249,000 Lebanese and 160,000 Syrian refugee children are now benefiting from free education in public schools. Those efforts notwithstanding, at least 300,000 Syrian children are still out of formal education. The Ministry of Education is currently developing a second "Reaching All Children with Education" plan aimed at enrolling all school-aged refugee children in formal and non-formal education and ensuring the retention of Lebanese children enrolled in public education.

48. Very few Palestine refugees entered Lebanon from the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period owing to the application of entry restrictions imposed by the Government of Lebanon in May 2014. The total number of Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic registered with UNRWA in Lebanon decreased slightly, to 42,000, following the return of some refugees to the Syrian Arab Republic, with others reportedly leaving the country in an attempt to reach Europe. They continue to face restrictions on renewing their legal status in Lebanon, which is causing further humanitarian challenges. The suspension of monthly cash assistance for housing, which started in July 2015, also increased the vulnerability of this group.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

49. As in the previous reporting period, five manual mine clearance teams, one explosive ordnance disposal team and one mechanical mine clearance team were validated and deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. UNIFIL cleared 136 square metres of contaminated land to provide access to Blue Line points during the reporting period. Furthermore, the United Nations Mine Action Service conducted eight quality assurance visits to operational and completed sites in the area of operations and seven safety monitoring visits to refurbishment sites. The Mine Action Service contributed mine risk awareness education material to the

Lebanon Mine Action Centre in the form of 5,000 puzzles to be distributed in the schools of Lebanon.

F. Delineation of borders

50. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the Lebanese-Syrian border during the reporting period, including in areas where it is uncertain or disputed, as called for in Security Council resolutions 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The delineation and demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic must be carried out as soon as practicable so that the Government of Lebanon can extend its authority throughout all Lebanese territory and the Lebanese security forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces can secure the borders to prevent the entry of arms or related materiel.

51. There has also been no progress on the issue of the Shaba'a Farms. There has still been no reaction to the provisional definition of that area contained in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641) from either Israel or the Syrian Arab Republic.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

52. UNIFIL reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures in close coordination with the Lebanese authorities and provided security awareness training to its personnel and their dependants. Force protection works to upgrade installations and assets are ongoing. Stringent security measures remain in force in the Arqoub area (Sector East), where movements by UNIFIL and other United Nations civilian personnel require security escort. UNIFIL implemented temporary precautionary measures during the 20 December and 4 January incidents, including restrictions of movement in some areas and personnel taking shelter in some United Nations positions.

53. UNIFIL continued to monitor proceedings at the Lebanese Military Court against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. In the case of a serious attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent in 2007, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court was conducted on 30 October 2015, and the next one is scheduled for 1 July 2016. In the case of a serious attack in 2008, in which one of the four previously sentenced perpetrators filed an appeal, a hearing at the Military Court of Appeal was held on 25 November 2015, and the next one is scheduled for 10 March 2016. In three cases of serious attacks perpetrated in 2011, the investigation is ongoing. In a case of terror intent opened in January 2014, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court was held on 5 February. The Court scheduled the next hearing for 13 June 2016.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

54. As at 5 February, UNIFIL consisted of 10,528 military personnel from 40 troop-contributing countries, including 394 women, as well as 252 international and 551 national civilian staff, including 75 and 145 women, respectively. In addition,

56 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), including 4 women, are part of UNIFIL. UNIFIL is working to increase the number of civilian and military women deployed, with a view to reducing the gender imbalance in the mission.

V. Observations

55. I reiterate my condemnation of the attack against two vehicles of the Israel Defense Forces on 4 January 2016, claimed by Hizbullah. I also condemn the firing of rockets towards Israel on 20 December 2015. Both incidents constituted serious violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and of the cessation of hostilities. Retaliatory fire by Israel into Lebanon is also in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the cessation of hostilities and does not conform to the United Nations expectation that the parties will notify UNIFIL of an incident and refrain from responding, except where clearly required in immediate self-defence.

56. I welcome the current resumption of calm but the incidents of 20 December and 4 January are a reminder that the situation along the Blue Line is fragile and vulnerable to developments in the region. There is a high risk of miscalculation as to the potentially devastating consequences for Lebanon and Israel. The incident of 4 January, in particular, posed a very real risk of renewed conflict across the Blue Line. I therefore call upon the parties to adhere fully to resolution 1701 (2006) and respect the cessation of hostilities and, to that end, urge them to take the necessary measures, in close coordination with UNIFIL, to prevent any act that may undermine calm and stability in the area.

57. I welcome the continued reliance by the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces on the UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements as a key element in preventing and defusing tensions along the Blue Line and containing incidents when they do occur. In that regard, both parties should notify UNIFIL of planned exercises, in particular if they take place in close proximity to the Blue Line and include live firing. Such activities could cause misunderstandings between the parties or place persons coming close to the Line, including UNIFIL personnel, in danger.

58. Consistent with the constructive approach adopted by both sides in the tripartite forum, I call upon the parties to step up efforts to fulfil their respective obligations to achieve further progress towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and, in particular, to seek concrete ways to strengthen the foundation for a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict, as envisaged in the resolution. I urge the parties to work with my Special Coordinator and UNIFIL to examine areas where progress can be made towards a permanent ceasefire.

59. I note the recent progress made by the parties, in cooperation with UNIFIL, on the visible marking of the Blue Line and call upon both sides to redouble their efforts to find points of agreement in relation to the stretches of the Blue Line where they consider marking to be contentious. I also recall that full respect for the Blue Line is a critical factor in maintaining calm and stability in the area and that any deliberate violation of the Blue Line is unacceptable.

60. The absence of progress on the Shaba'a Farms area in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006) is a source of increasing concern. Developments on the

ground during the reporting period demonstrated, once again, the potential for destabilization that comes from not addressing that issue. I reiterate my call to the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to submit their responses to the provisional definition of the Shaba'a Farms area provided in my report of 30 October 2007.

61. The Israel Defense Forces continue to occupy northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). I once more remind Israel of its obligation to withdraw its armed forces from the area, in accordance with the resolution. I urge the Israeli authorities to take steps to that end and encourage them to make further use of the UNIFIL presence, liaison and coordination arrangements to facilitate a smooth and secure withdrawal from the area.

62. It remains of serious concern that Israel continues to violate Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis, in complete disregard of the sovereignty of Lebanon and the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). I once again call upon the Government of Israel to cease all overflights of Lebanese territory and territorial waters.

63. I am deeply concerned about the presence of unauthorized weapons in the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), as clearly indicated by the firing of rockets from the UNIFIL area of operations and the use of assault rifles during the incident of 17 November 2015 against UNIFIL peacekeepers, as well as the frequent sighting by UNIFIL of individuals carrying hunting weapons. The continued presence of armed hunters, who at times also crossed the Blue Line, has the potential to cause incidents between the parties. I call upon the Government of Lebanon, who holds the primary responsibility to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations, to take all actions to that end.

64. I am concerned about the instances of aggressive behaviour against UNIFIL. I recall that the Government of Lebanon has the primary responsibility to ensure the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and urge the Lebanese authorities to continue to cooperate with UNIFIL to guarantee adequate protection of the peacekeepers, including by bringing to justice the perpetrators of acts committed against them.

65. I am reassured, nevertheless, that these isolated incidents between local individuals and UNIFIL are not a reflection of the mission's relationship with the local population, which remains positive. I welcome the continued efforts by UNIFIL to cultivate that relationship and also welcome the fact that Lebanese authorities and communities in the area of operations have reiterated their commitment to work with UNIFIL to maintain the prevailing calm and stability.

66. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah does not provide protection to Lebanon, as claimed by the group, but rather undermines the rule of law in Lebanon and poses serious threats to Lebanese sovereignty and stability. Nearly 10 years after a destructive but avoidable war between Hizbullah and Israel, the maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups outside the control of the State continues to contradict the country's obligations under resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). I am deeply concerned at the readiness and willingness of Hizbullah to use its capabilities in violation of resolution 1701 (2006), as the incident of 4 January across the Blue Line again demonstrates. The threat made by Hizbullah Secretary-General Nasrallah against Israeli civilians on 16 February is a chilling example of unacceptable statements, which I condemn. Should Hizbullah's possession of arms

or attempts to procure sophisticated weapons provoke conflict, the consequences are potentially very grave for Lebanon and for the region. The arms held by Hizbullah and other groups are an issue to be addressed by the National Dialogue, and it remains vital that, once a President is elected, the National Dialogue reconvene as soon as possible to address issues of fundamental importance to Lebanon and of direct concern to the international community. It remains important that earlier decisions by the National Dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada. Protracted deferral in dealing with these issues has increased the risks to Lebanon and Israel.

67. I condemn the participation of Lebanese citizens in the Syrian conflict, in breach of the policy of disassociation adopted by the Government of Lebanon and of the principles of the Baabda Declaration of June 2012, which was agreed upon by all Lebanese political parties and the importance of which has been reaffirmed by the Security Council. I call upon all Lebanese parties to cease any involvement in the Syrian conflict, consistent with their commitment in the Baabda Declaration, and to recommit to the policy of disassociation.

68. I remain concerned at the risk of further radicalization in Lebanon as a result of domestic factors and the regional environment. Consistent with the global Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which I launched on 6 January, the United Nations stands ready to assist the Lebanese authorities in their efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism and is exploring avenues for early collaboration in that regard. I urge all national and international stakeholders to work with the United Nations to formulate a comprehensive approach to preventing violent extremism in Lebanon in order to protect the country's unique multi-confessional nature.

69. I condemn the movement of fighters and war materiel across the Lebanese-Syrian border in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), as well as shelling, shooting and aerial incursions into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate that the lack of a delineated, demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border is no justification for violations of Lebanese sovereignty by any party. I call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and groups fighting in Qalamoun to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

70. I note again the proliferation of arms outside the control of the Lebanese State. Illegally held firearms pose a serious threat to the security of the citizens of Lebanon and undermine the rule of law. I call upon Member States to uphold their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) to prevent the sale or supply of arms or related materiel to entities or individuals in Lebanon.

71. I commend the Lebanese Armed Forces and the security services for their role in meeting the many security challenges faced by Lebanon, including securing Lebanon's borders with the Syrian Arab Republic, working alongside UNIFIL in southern Lebanon in implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and ensuring domestic security. I reiterate the importance of the close collaboration between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). In particular, I recall that building the capacity of the Forces for tasks mandated under resolution 1701 (2006) in the UNIFIL area of operations is a

strategic priority and an important element towards the full implementation of the resolution. I note positively the appointment of the three members of the military council, ending the vacancies in those posts. It remains important that there be certainty in the process of appointing the leadership of the Lebanese Armed Forces and that the process remain depoliticized to ensure public confidence in the independence of the Lebanese Armed Forces. I welcome the continuing support of key bilateral partners in providing equipment and training to the Forces and in working to develop civil-military cooperation and human rights components. I urge international partners and donors to continue to be forthcoming in support of enhancing the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces, consistent with the updated capabilities development plan and the strategic dialogue plan to enable the Forces to undertake the functions mandated under resolution 1701 (2006).

72. I welcome the renewed political engagement between the parties during the reporting period, which led to the legislation passed in Parliament in November 2015, the resumption of cabinet sessions and an intensification of efforts to resolve the presidential vacuum. I commend Prime Minister Salam's continued leadership and efforts to allow the Government to function effectively. The 20-month vacancy in the presidency remains of deep concern, given that it seriously impairs the ability of Lebanon to address the security, economic, social and humanitarian challenges facing the country. The protracted political crisis also risks fuelling deeper alienation and radicalization among segments of the population, to the detriment of responsible citizenship. I reiterate the call by the Security Council for all Lebanese leaders to adhere to the Constitution of Lebanon and to the Taef Agreement and National Pact, to put the stability and national interests of Lebanon ahead of partisan politics, and to act responsibly and with leadership and flexibility to urgently convene a parliamentary session and proceed to the election of a president. I therefore call upon Members of Parliament boycotting the parliamentary sessions on the presidency to convene urgently and elect a president without further delay.

73. I note the Government's allocation of the budget for municipal elections and welcome the opportunity for Lebanese citizens to exercise their right to elect their local representatives. I urge the Lebanese authorities to ensure that the municipal elections are held on time. I further encourage the Lebanese authorities to ensure that measures are taken to improve the representation of women and offer any further technical support by the United Nations necessary to assist in the process.

74. The proceedings of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon continue to reflect the international community's commitment to combating impunity. Separately, I note the release of former Minister Michel Samaha from prison on bail, pending his appeal of his conviction on terrorism charges in May 2015. I once again urge the Lebanese judicial and security authorities to continue their efforts to combat impunity.

75. I thank the Member States participating in the International Support Group for Lebanon and welcome the continued engagement, at the working level, by the Group in Beirut, led by my Special Coordinator. The Group has met to coordinate efforts and messaging on the peace and security, stabilization and humanitarian and developmental issues facing Lebanon. The Group remains an important forum for engagement with national stakeholders and for advocacy for expanded international engagement in support of the resilience, stability and security of Lebanon.

76. In the context of slowing economic growth, I remain concerned at the increased vulnerability, the rising poverty and the unemployment of refugee and host populations in Lebanon, in particularly among women and young people. I thank the Lebanese people and the Government of Lebanon for their continuing generosity towards refugees, pending conditions that allow for a safe return, and I note the continued importance of adherence to the principle of non-refoulement.

77. I am thankful for the increase in the support by the international community to Lebanon, in particular as part of the commitments to significantly increase support to the response to the Syrian crisis announced at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference held in London on 4 February. Given the scale of needs in-country, I reiterate my call for partners to sustain their engagement in Lebanon and to combine immediate humanitarian relief with longer-term approaches. Strengthening the economic stability and growth of Lebanon will help to alleviate deepening vulnerability among the Lebanese and the refugees and contribute to preserving the country's stability. The implementation of the London commitments will be crucial to address these challenges and expand economic opportunities for both host communities and refugees.

78. I welcome recent discussions on the new financing initiative to support the Middle East and North Africa region led by the World Bank, with the support of the United Nations and the Islamic Development Bank, which would provide an opportunity for Lebanon to access international financing at more concessional terms. Such an opportunity would help to lessen the economic and social burden of Lebanon and other countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees – all of which, through their response, are providing a global public good.

79. I welcome the continued commitment of the Palestinian leadership to disassociate the Palestinian camps in Lebanon from the violence in the region. The need to improve the living conditions of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, without prejudice to the resolution of the refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement, is ever more urgent. In that regard, the international community must commit additional resources to complete the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared Palestine refugee camp, which began in 2009. The recent protests show the increased reliance of the Palestine refugees on UNRWA services and indicate that a more sustainably funded UNRWA contributes to more stability in Lebanon and the region. Palestine refugees displaced in Lebanon from the Syrian Arab Republic are becoming increasingly vulnerable. I encourage donors to be forthcoming in their support of UNRWA, to avert a new funding crisis in 2016 and allow the Agency to carry out its mandate to assist Palestine refugees effectively.

80. For both Lebanon and Israel, exploration and development of their respective offshore oil and gas resources are national priorities. I again encourage both Lebanon and Israel to proceed with steps that would allow for a resolution of the dispute over the exclusive economic zone, given that no progress was made during the reporting period. The United Nations stands ready to assist if both parties so request.

81. Lebanon continues to suffer the impact of the crises across the region and of the Syrian conflict in particular. Breaches of the cessation of hostilities during the reporting period reflect again the danger of the spillover of violent events in the Syrian Arab Republic and the serious threat they pose to the stability of Lebanon. The country's stability cannot be taken for granted. Lebanon continues to face a

multitude of complex challenges and the United Nations will continue to work to address those issues with its Lebanese and international partners in a "whole of Lebanon" approach that incorporates the Organization's commitment to human rights and gender equality. Progress on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and other outstanding Security Council resolutions will be central to longer-term solutions to end the conflict in the region and to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

82. I wish to extend my continued appreciation to all countries contributing troops and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon of UNTSO. I thank my Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Sigrid Kaag, and the staff of her office; the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Luciano Portolano; and the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL for their important roles in promoting stability and security in Lebanon and across the Blue Line at a critical time for Lebanon and the region.